

HB 5388-AN ACT CREATING A RESPECTFUL AND OPEN WORLD FOR NATURAL HAIR.

Senator Kushner (Co-Chair), Representative Porter (Co-Chair) and Members of Labor and Public Employees Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

My name is Amani Shirley and I live in Hartford, Connecticut. I stand in support of H.B. 5388 An act creating a respectful and open world for natural hair. This policy is to prohibit discrimination on the basis of ethnic hairstyles historically associated with race, by adopting what is commonly referred to as the CROWN Act.

I take pride in wearing my natural hair, especially when it is styled in an afro. My natural hair is a statement of me being bold and comfortable in whom I am as an individual. I should not have to alter the texture of my hair for it to fit into what is considered professional and acceptable to society and the workplace. Wearing natural styles provides a sense of identity and originality. It is difficult trying to alter my hair to make it straight compared to my natural hair. I remember times that I would have to include “professional” hairstyles for black women when looking for a new style. In today’s world, this is unacceptable. Women of color should be able to embrace their textured hair and not have their professionalism questioned. Natural hairstyles are only seemed inappropriate or criticized in communities of color.

This is a form of discrimination that occurs in the workplace and in schools. It is totally unacceptable. When this happens at schools, children are ridiculed and embarrassed in front of their peers. Students are being denied the chance to walk across the stage for graduations even though they have completed the graduation requirements, but due to their natural hairstyle they will not be able participate in the walk at graduation unless they alter their hair. Natural hairstyles on African American girls are labeled as “ghetto”. These discriminatory and degrading statements are totally inappropriate and do not belong in school settings.

This bill is important to me as a Connecticut resident as Connecticut is a state that I currently reside, work and pay taxes in. I would like to continue to grow here and work on my career and I will be wearing natural hairstyles and can possibly be discriminated against based on my hairstyle. The bill relate to the advancement of anti-discrimination legislation as people of color are discriminated against when they wear their natural hairstyles. This bill will help to end discrimination in the workplace and school settings. The public should be aware of this issue to fully understand how black people are mistreated and discriminated against even after racial movements that have occurred to improve and better the lives of black Americans.

Legislators I urge you to support this bill. Connecticut would be following after the state of California and our neighboring states of New York and New Jersey that passed legislation to ensure protections against discrimination based on hairstyles or texture. The bill is also known as the CROWN Act and includes protection in the areas of housing and state education. Black women are 80% more likely to change their natural hair to fit in at the office. As a child, my family was aware that I wanted to become a lawyer and I was told that I would have to relax my hair for the position. I have never had a relaxer and I will not, I currently see Black lawyers that are wearing their natural hair and able to perform their job duties effectively, so there should be no discrimination due to a natural hair choice. Perms and relaxers leave long-lasting damages on the hair such as breakage and can cause infections. Relaxers straighten the hair and provide a European look that is also equated to beauty standards of European culture.

I agree with the solution proposed stating that ensured protection against discrimination based on hairstyles by including in the Statutes that the protected class of race also includes traits historically associated with race identification (hair texture and hairstyles). This bill will be supportive of black individuals and cause a sense of relief in the workplace and employees being able to be more comfortable at work as employers will not be able enforce grooming policies that are seemed as race neutral. This bill will also lead to cultural sensitivity in grooming policies and a change in what is considered professionalism in the Eurocentric standpoint and promotes diversity. I am satisfied that the bill will promote diversity as, I had a time in which I was one of two black women in my department and I would wear my hair in an afro and multiple comments and questions would arise.

In closing, I urge you to support H.B. 5388 An act creating a respectful and open world for natural hair to prohibit discrimination based on hair style and hair texture.

Thank you for your time.